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# Leaks, Lies & Government By Sleight of Mouth

By Art Buchwald

**T**HE PRESIDENT has issued an executive order requiring every federal employe with a security clearance to sign a nondisclosure pledge and submit to lie detector tests if asked.

Reagan's given reason was to prevent leaks of classified information. His real reason was to stop leaks that make his administration look incompetent or bad.

Will this stop leaking in Washington?

"Not on your life," said Stanley Pincher, chief coordinator of Leaks

## Capitol Punishment

for High Government Officials. "But the government will now have much better control over what is leaked to the press and what is withheld because it would give us a black eye."

"What constitutes a good leak?"

"Top secret information about the nuclear superiority of the Soviet Union. We want that leaked out as fast as possible, especially while Congress is debating the defense budget."

"What, in your opinion, is a bad leak?"

"Top secret information of sweet-heart deals with U.S. defense contractors on weapons now in production that don't work and cost three times as much as we said they would."

"I can see why you wouldn't want that kind of information leaked," I said. "The lie detector will be a great help in stopping whistle blowers from ratting on the administration."

"It may not stop all unofficial leaks, but it will certainly have a chilling effect on anyone who leaks to cover up wrongdoings."

"How does your department operate?"

"We have a National Council of Office Leakers, which meets every Monday morning. It is composed of senior officials from all the departments and agencies, and is chaired by a very high White House source. Each official presents the leaks he would like to pass on to the media that week. If, for example, the gross national product is going up, Commerce will ask to leak it, and if un-

employment is going down, we'll let Labor leak it."

"This is all nuts and bolts stuff. The big leaks, to have any credibility, have to come directly from the White House."

"Would you give me an example?"

"Well suppose it's decided that Secretary of the Interior James Watt will have to go because of the EPA scandal. I'm not saying we have decided it yet—but we can't rule out that he is becoming a political liability. A White House aide will tell a reporter, 'This is off the record, but the president has no intention of firing Jim Watt.'"

"The very fact that the White House aide denied it without being asked immediately alerts the reporter that something is in the wind. He reports it and the rest of the media pick it up. When Watt reads about it he calls the president and asks him if he wants him to resign. The president says of course not. Watt can have his job as long as he wants. This private conversation is also leaked to the press, and pretty soon the only question is not will Watt resign but when."

"It's the old 'leak by denial' trick," I said. "They've used it on me a hundred times."

"It never fails. The trick of leaking when it comes to firing somebody in the administration is not to push him out the window, but make him jump of his own free will."

"What about unauthorized leaks? Is that where the lie detector comes in?"

"That's correct. As soon as we read a leak that we didn't okay, we send F. Lee Bailey and his technicians over to the department to take the tests. Anyone who refuses to have the electrodes attached to his chest will automatically be dismissed. If he takes the test and Bailey decides he's lying, the leaker is pushed out the window."

"But isn't it true that lie detectors are very unreliable and can't even be admitted in court as evidence?"

"The president was aware of it, and the lie detector was not his first choice. He preferred to have an employe swear on the Bible he wasn't a leaker. But to his chagrin he discovered this was unconstitutional."

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